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**Health Department Makes Recommendations for
Healthy Yet Tasty Kids' Lunches**

Now that the school year has begun, parents again must face the challenge of providing healthy, easy-to-prepare lunches that their kids won't trade or discard.

With new food labeling laws for bad, trans fat expected in 2006, big food companies are taking notice and reducing trans fat in their products. Parents also can trend away from trans fat in their kids' lunches. Trans fat abounds in cookies, snack crackers, and cheese puffs and has been linked to heart disease and diabetes.

To keep kids' lunches healthy yet palate-pleasing, Toby Smithson, R.D., L.D. a Registered Dietitian with the Lake County Health Department/ Community Health Center and spokesperson for the Illinois Dietetic Association, suggests packing reduced fat snack crackers, baked or reduced fat chips, or mini muffins. A favorite snack in her house is a homemade trail mix. Mix whole-wheat cereal squares, raisins, nuts, and a few chocolate chips into a bowl. The "bit" of chocolate adds an extra incentive.

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Smithson emphasizes packing fruit in every school lunch. “Try fresh ideas with fruit” she said. “Pack a mixture of apple and pineapple chunks, and send this with a container of fat free caramel apple dip and a fork.” Other ideas she recommends are experimenting with new fruits, like star fruit or pluots (also called dinosaur eggs), and trying different forms of fruit, like 100 percent fruit leather.

“Also remember safe storage,” Smithson says. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that about 76 million Americans suffer food borne illness every year, and young children especially are at high-risk. Smithson advises, “Pack lunches so meat and milk foods stay cold until lunchtime. Use insulated lunch bags with freezer packs, or pack a frozen water bottle or juice box next to foods that must be kept cold.”

Start this school year with a commitment to prepare easy-to-make, healthy lunches that please the palate and fuel the mind. And most of all, make lunches that your kids won’t trade.

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